A NEEDS SURVEY OF THE CHINESE ELDERLY IN CALGARY 1987

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

(Highlights from Survey Findings)

An Oi Kwan Foundation Project

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SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Summary

Chinese elderly in this study include those of age 60 years and above.

In 1987 in the City of Calgary 1509 Chinese elderly were identified (M=45.6% and F=54.4%). A random sample of 148 (M=45.9% and F=54.1%) were successfully interviewed ("The Respondents"). The random sample was judged to be representative of the total 1509 persons.

The mean age for the Respondents was 69.9 years (M=68.9 and F=70.9).

The Respondents were divided into four (4) age groups,

(a) the "Near Aged" (60 - 64 years): N=40, 27.0%, (M=22, 55.0%, F=18, 45.0%);

(b) the "Junior Aged" (65 - 74 years): N=65, 43.9%, (M=32, 49.2%, F=33, 50.8%);

(c) the "Senior Aged" (75 - 84 years): N=37, 25.0%, (M=13, 35.1%, F=24, 64.9%);

(d) the "Very Old" (85 and older): N=6, 4.1%, (M=1, 16.7%, F=5, 83.3%).

Most of them are married (61.6%), or widowed (33.6%). Divorce has no occurance.

On the average, the Respondents have been in Canada for 15 years. They came for reasons of family reunification.

Like the Chinese population in general in Calgary, the Chinese elderly live in different parts of the City. About 33.3% live in the Northeast-Forest Lawn area, and 19.0% live along the Centre Street corridor. Chinatown is home to 24.5% of the Respondents, mostly in the highrise apartments; 15.5% live in Oi Kwan Place and Wai Kwan Manor.

By far the majority of them do not have a good command of the English language. They communicate well in Chinese.

Overall, they are satisfied with life. Their average life satisfaction index is 5.08 (S.D.=0.85) along the

Terrible-Delighted Scale. There is no significant statistical difference in life satisfaction index between male-female groups, among the four age groups, and between members and non-members of the Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens Association. However, when comparing residents of Oi Kwan Place and Wai Kwan Manor with non-residents, the non-residents have significantly higher life satisfaction index.

With reference to the living arrangements, most of them live in family housing. About 24.8% live in highrise apartments, only 15.5% live in Oi Kwan Place and Wai Kwan Monor. If in the future they have difficulty taking care of themselves, they would prefer moving in with family. If they had to go to a nursing home, they would consider the Chinese service (language, food, etc.), and the location of the nursing home is very important.

Overall, most Chinese seniors do not have valid drivers' licences. They rely on public transportation. 71.6% have senior citizen transit passes. Alternatively, they rely on others to chauffeur them. They do a lot of walking, for specific purpose and for leisure.

They maintain very good contact with families and with friends. Once again, they affirm their family (sons, daughters and siblings) provide meaningful contacts.

The top twenty most frequently participated activities are:

Talk on the phone with friends....	97%
Dim Sum.....	91%
Visit from family.....	87%
Go to restaurants.....	87%
Talk on phone with family.....	86%
Visit from friends.....	85%
Take walks.....	84%
Visit friends.....	80%
Visit family members.....	76%
Indoor gardening.....	76%
Short trips within Calgary.....	75%
Chinese videos.....	75%
Reading.....	74%
Day trip from Calgary.....	72%
Watch Chinavision television.....	69%
Listen to Chinese Audio cassette..	68%
Travel away from Calgary.....	68%
Look after grandchildren.....	63%
Watch CCCB television.....	62%
Watch English television.....	61%

On the other hand, the ten least participated activities are:

Cultural programs	14%
Volunteer work	14%

Watch sporting events	14%
Participate in other sports	12%
Play musical instruments	12%
Movie/English language	11%
Social drinks	10%
Home workshop projects	9%
Painting, drawing	8%
Other table games	5%

"Not interested" is indicated as a reason for non-participation by Respondents in 42 out of the 43 listed activities. Significantly, the only one activity for which the "not interested" comment is not identified as a barrier is "taking care of grandchildren."

Most of the Chinese elderly think they have good or excellent health. While one-half of them (50.7%) feel they are the same as five years ago, about one-third (33.1%) think they are worse. Like other Canadians, they can call on their family doctor for medical care. They can communicate with their family doctor in Chinese and they, by far, are satisfied with the care they receive. About one-third (35.1%) think their limited vision, and one-eighth (12.8%) think their poor hearing causes them difficulties in their daily activities. Only less than one-third of them have had a sight or hearing test in the last twelve months. They do not feel they need more medical care than they are receiving at the time of the interview.

By and large, most feel they do not have problems in the majority of the 18 listed daily activities. In the six hypothetical problem situations, the Respondents turn first to their spouse for help, then to their younger relatives for help.

Of the 24.5% Respondents who live in Chnatown, 15.5% live in the two senior citizen apartments when the survey was taken - the Oi Kwan Place and the Wai Kwan Manor. Today (Dec. 1988) there are three such residences. Notwithstanding, they and those who live elsewhere in the City think Chinatown is important for grocery shopping, eating, recreation (probably Majong) and meeting friends.

As to other community services, less than 10% of Respondents say grocery store, drug store, bank, bus stop are not conveniently located, and over 60% of them (who say these services are not conveniently located) say these amenities are needed. About one-quarter of them indicate restaurants, post office and medical clinic are not conveniently located. Over 70% of them (who say these services are not conveniently located) say these services are needed. On the other hand, 26% say medical clinics and about one-half say dental clinics are not conveniently located, but only 47% and 60% (who say these services are not conveniently located) say these medical services are needed.

Notably, over one-half the Chinese seniors say church and library are not conveniently located. Less than 25% of them (who say these services are not conveniently located) expressed the need for a library and only 12% for a church.

On the whole, the Chinese elderly have little or no knowledge of the various community services unless they have benefited from these services (especially financial-wise!)

Over 50% of them have less than $10,000 income per year, yet they feel their income adequately satisfies their needs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Canada has two official languages, these being English and French. Canada also affirms its commitment to a multicultural mosaic.

Most of the Chinese elderly came to Canada because they wanted to be reunited with their families. It is evident that they rely on their children for help when needed. Their command of the English language among most of these seniors is limited. They communicate well in Chinese. Their lack of English explains, or at least partly accounts for, their skimpy knowledge of services available. It is indeed a pleasant surprise to find that the Chinese elderly are 'mostly satisfied' with life. Notwithstanding, a caution is raised if and whenever a less-than-satisfactory-in-life person is indicated. Furthermore, this study also reinforces the support of developing a valid and reliable life satisfaction multi-scale for Chinese.

While close family ties are honorable, their participation in various community activities and services may be limited by their national language ability or inability.

In order to serve better and more meaningfully the Chinese seniors, they must be helped to communicate in the language in which they are most comfortable. Chinese staff, or Chinese aides, must be considered as part of the overall framework of service delivery to the Chinese elder.

As Dim Sum is a very popular activity among these seniors, Chinese merchants are urged to give discounts to Chinese elderly who go for Dim Sum. This discount could be modelled after the 'across the board' discount offered to seniors by the McDonald hamburger chain of restaurants. In the same vein, discount for various senior-related activities may be offered as part of an incentive bonus to be more active in their retirement years.

In so far as indoor gardening and taking care of grandchildren are popular activities indicated, more knowledge in these areas will no doubt enhance more pleasure and more safety.

Long/short trips are popular activities; these should be more frequently organized and promoted.

The now defunct library of the Calgary Chinese Public School must reopen its facilities. Perhaps the City Library could be challenged with the concept of a Chinese language mobile library.

Better and more adequately to serve the Chinese senior, the various services and benefits could be communicated to them at the level and language they can understand well.

If the activities of daily living should ever be examined again, it is suggested that problem areas be first identified, perhaps in an all-inclusive "scatter-gun" approach. How they deal with the problem, who and how they ask for help, may be examined posing hypothetical situations. This may help force the Respondents to work through the problems.

As it is, the Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens Association is providing many of these activities for its members. The role of the Association and its seervice contribution to the Chinese elderly in Calgary needs to be recognised. A more viable expansion of its service needs to be supported. Where and when opportunity arises, the Association may have to assume the role of the "Chinese Kirby Centre." Appropriate and expanded budgets and facilities must be considered. Perhaps one of the Senior Citizens' complexes could be challenged to house the "Chinese Kirby Centre?"

With reference to the Oi Kwan Foundation, it is respectfully urged that the Foundation continue its efforts towards enhancing the quality of life for the residents of its Oi Kwan and Wai Kwan senior citizens' apartments. Chinese reading materials and Chinese television facilities must be provided for, as part of its residential service. A "Day Care by Grannies" within the senior citizens' apartments is a concept that can be explored.

Epilogue

The investigators hope this study will provide topics for discussions, and actions for the Oi Kwan Foundation.

The data still available requires the Oi Kwan Foundation, or some other interested and capable persons, to make further analysis. The various age groups and interest groups should generate interesting patterns of needs and preferences. Using the data as a whole, by sub-groups, and by interest groups, should provide insights to, and research topics for the Chinese elderly.

This kind of needs study can be duplicated with other Chinese elderly groups, over place and time, in order to determine the differences if any, over space.

Finally this type of needs study of senior citizens may be made by the other cultural groups in the Canadian mosiac.